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Government Slow to Deliver for the Innu of Labrador

Ottawa – November 26, 2002 – The Canadian Human Rights Commission released a report today indicating that the federal government is not doing enough to fulfill its obligations to the Innu people of Labrador.

The Innu Nation first approached the Commission in 1992 to complain that the federal government had failed to meet its constitutional responsibility for the Innu since Newfoundland's 1949 entry into Confederation. The Commission responded by issuing a report in 1993 that identified five recommendations that the federal government should implement to address the concerns of the Innu.

At the time today's report was written, the government had fully implemented only one of the 1993 recommendations: recognizing its responsibility towards the Innu. It had failed the Innu with respect to efforts towards Innu self-government, and had made some progress under the remaining three recommendations. As recently as last week, however, the government officially recognized the members of the Innu of Labrador as status Indians, effectively fulfilling another of the 1993 recommendations.

Professor Donald M. McRae, author of the first report and co-author of today's follow-up, commented on his recent findings: "The 1993 recommendations were clear and in some respects the federal government is working to implement them. But there have been substantial delays and key matters have not been addressed. The fundamental problems affecting the lives of the Innu people remain unresolved."

Today's report, by Professors McRae and Constance Backhouse of the Faculty of Law at the University of Ottawa, reviews the federal government's response to those recommendations. It also looks at the 1993 report's recommendations in relation to proposals by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the situation of the Innu in light of Canada's international human rights commitments, and the government's obligation to compensate the Innu for shortfalls in its treatment vis-à-vis other First Nations people.

See the backgrounder for highlights of the report and its recommendations.

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